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Who Are You, Class of 2019

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Who Are You Entering Class, 2016

We have many traditions here at Richmond Law and one of those traditions affords me the pleasure of welcoming you and introducing you, my 30th entering class, to one of those traditions – the Richmond Law Challenge. The challenge is to listen closely to what I am about to share – what we call factoids – about your classmates and to discover who they are and what they bring to the great diversity of thought and culture that make this law school the special place it is. Each of the 112 of you that make up the 1L class, each of you International JD students, transfer students, each of you LLM students will leave an indelible mark on each other and on this law school. To discover who is who is the challenge I issue you now.

While you may believe you were the only ones doing the “vetting” – searching web sites, considering the “bible” of rankings, getting suggestions from prelaw advisors, lawyers, friends, family and weighing one law school against another, we too did our own searching. We covered a lot of territory - 93,000 miles – a third more than last year – by land and air to find you and invite you to become part of our law school family.

One hundred and twelve first-year students make up the Class of 2019. Fourteen of you are entering with advanced standing, some from the far corners of the world. Four of you are part of our second LLM class. Four of you are international exchange students from Germany, Italy and Sweden. Others are from Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Brazil, Spain, South Africa, the Russian Federation, and Poland. No matter where you are from, you are here today due to the sacrifices of those who love you and you are standing on the shoulders of those who came before you and have paved the way for your success.

Competing against 1,871 applicants – an increase of 5% from the previous year – who were graduates of 597 universities – 80 more than last year, you won a seat despite increased odds as we sought not to be surprised by our own popularity as we were last year, and sought to have a much smaller 1L class. Applicants from all 50 states, DC, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and 42 foreign countries vied for seats this year just in the 1L class.

You are a pretty darn smart group as measured by LSAT and GPA and other important factors. Your median GPA is the highest in our history – 3.55; the median LSAT – 161 – is higher than last year. Sitting alongside you are graduates of 66 US colleges and universities and 13 universities around the world. Eight of you are double Spiders. Here is a most interesting statistic: 73% of you graduated prior to 2016; a considerably higher percentage than in previous years. One of you graduated in 1990. Twenty of you are married – two of you as recently as this summer – or were at the time you applied. Nine of you have children – that we know of – and two of you have twins.....together. You majored in 42 different disciplines, with the greatest number of you – 23 majoring in political science. Several of you, gluttons for

punishment, triple majored. Forty four – fully 40% of your - class achieved Latin Honors, graduating Cum, Magna and Summa Cum Laude. Four of you were elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Several of you have been elected to ODK, have achieved the Gold Award and 3 of you are Eagle Scouts; one of you is a 3rd degree Mason. Ten of you have advanced degrees including one of you who has earned an LLB, MBA, LLM *and* a MS. Thirteen of you are citizens of 8 different countries. Nearly half of you – 48% - are from out of state, representing 28 different states and DC, spanning the country from Massachusetts to Washington State. The eldest of you is 50 and the youngest is 20 with your class's average age being a fairly elderly 26 compared to a more typical age over many years of 24. Also fascinating, is the ratio of males to females – 63 women and only 49 men. Ladies, please take it easy on these poor fellows!

You are a well-traveled group – wholeheartedly embracing much of what the world has to offer, and working hard to improve that world. You've been on mission trips, studied abroad or just satisfied your curiosity by getting out and seeing the world. Believe it or not, a woman in your class has not only backpacked Europe and Southeast Asia for months, but also motorcycled Vietnam; you hiked the Presidential Mountain Range, climbed the world's tallest waterfall in Venezuela, scaled England's highest mountain, *and* crewed on a boat which sailed around the Caribbean. Some of this travel has been less than idyllic – one of you, whose family fled the former Soviet Union at age 12 wrote, "Like so many other immigrants my family – myself included – hoped and dreamed for a better life in a more stable country, and so we left everything we knew to pursue that chance". You speak 15 foreign languages – Afrikaans, Arabic, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hebrew, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu.

Many of you have been inspired to follow your chosen path by the lawyers in your family, and actually three of you have survived living with parents who are both attorneys. I imagine your negotiating skills have been finely honed! Thirteen of you have a family connection to UR – fathers, brothers, mothers, grandfathers, cousins and one of you, a fiancé. One of you has two brothers who graduated from this law school – one of them your twin. Quite a few of you are the first generation of your family to earn a degree. This year I was struck by how many of you are the sons and daughters of professors and teachers.

You've had pretty amazing careers pre law school. A great number of you have been paralegals, law clerks or had internships in law firms. One of you, a Business Systems Analyst, wrote this: "By 2015, 67 Saudi female lawyers were licensed to practice law in Saudi Arabia. I am hoping that one day soon I will be one of these pioneering ladies". Another woman in your class has been both a paralegal and an ESL teacher for a laborers union. A founder of the management company that manages the Dave Matthews Band was also a pastry chef in NYC and graduated 1st in her class from the French Culinary Institute. The admissions staff has already made friends with her – they're hoping it's friends with tasty benefits! One of you managed outreach operations to public school superintendents across the country; another managed a moving company after quite literally being part of Two Men & a Truck. There are 4 of you for whom travel wasn't quite as leisurely as others in your class who travelled the world. Each of you had Afghanistan as your destination though not by choice. One of you joined the

Navy at 19 and was hand-picked to work with, and for, Special Forces such as SEAL Teams and Marine Special Ops; this student was also an instructor for the National Cryptologic School and served on the USS Iwo Jima. The US Army was home to another of you who is a designated marksman and served in the elite 75th Ranger Regiment having gone to the US Airborne and Ranger Schools. We are enormously grateful for your service, gentlemen and we salute you.

One of your classmates owns a successful internet book store and another won an award for her design and leadership to prove Elon Musk's Hyperloop, a conceptual high speed transport of pods shot through tubes at over 700 mph. I have great admiration for farmers – one of you who worked in swine operations, co owns a farm, and managed a premier meat goat operation. Talk about enterprising and grit – one of you conducted more than 32 funerals, visitations and memorial services within 2 months, closed and secured caskets and led funeral corteges to churches and burial sites – what else could we expect from a former Marine? Think you've had tough jobs? One of you worked on the Honda assembly line and wrote, "This is the job that taught me why I wanted to go to into law as I watched numerous co-workers fired because of injury, often with no options to fight back". I know you'll want to meet your classmate who speaks *only* 5 languages, and was CEO of a Power & Energy Company 5 countries including the USA and Canada. Another of you developed strategy to advise Ralph Lauren on menswear design and most recently led a short form film studio and distribution company. The SBA is on notice that amongst you is a woman who has been employed as a bartender in a Professional Bull Riding Bar.

You are accomplished athletes and musicians. You have big dreams and are ambitious. You will find, in your class, a Division I lacrosse player, soccer players, tennis pros, an expert woodcarver, trap-shooter, fencing expert, players of all manner of Varsity sports – including a cheerleader. One of you dreamed of being a Victoria Secret model until you figured out you needed a Plan B. Don't laugh – one of you men dreamed of playing in the NBA! Perhaps we could get the trumpeter, acoustic guitarist; the classically trained pianist and the other musicians in your class to join your classmate who was a touring musician, and played mandolin for a bluegrass band to play at the SBA Law ReVue. I'm fascinated by step dance and there is an expert Irish step dancer in your class.

Politics and public service take a great deal of your time. You've been congressional and legislative aides and you've been politicians. If there is a charity or a need for a volunteer across the globe – you've answered the call. You join our law school in having a serious commitment to public service and each of you has given from the heart thousands of hours of your time to benefit others. You extend a helping hand wherever you see a need and do not restrict your efforts only to benefit your own country and its citizens. You are EMTs and have participated in search and rescue efforts. You work hard to raise funds to eradicate disease; you teach, you volunteer at homeless shelters, you go on mission trips, you donate blood and you sweat working to teach disabled children to ride horses, participate in Special Olympics, and you march for your favorite causes. You train dogs for the blind, rescue animals, volunteer for just about every organized charity in existence. One of you was a leader responsible for 10-12 girls with disabilities and had blind kids on 1,000' zip lines, brain injured kids on high ropes courses

and Downs syndrome kids on 30 foot water slides. You give of yourselves and your altruistic spirit is alive and well.

It is said that life is a contact sport and so many of you are survivors of life's more difficult times yet you endure and strive to be better. You come from privilege and you come from poverty. One of you was the victim of a tornado which destroyed everything you owned. "G-d provides every bird with a worm, but he does not throw it into the nest" is a saying one of you grew up with and that saying sustained you through extremely difficult times. Some of you are redefining what it means to be a modern family. Many of you are "self-made" and have had experiences we wish you hadn't. Illness, discrimination; death of loved ones, family breakups, life out of control - trauma of many kinds but you've made lemonade from the lemons you were handed and have refused to be defeated. One of your classmates said it well, "It has been said that both optimists and pessimists make their contribution to society – the former invent the airplane and the latter, the parachute. I want to help build the airplane that works so we don't need the parachute."

Each year I'm gratified to continue to see words such as integrity, commitment, honesty, public service, ethics and loyalty permeate your narrative statements. I've been thrilled to see that the reasons so many of you have chosen to go to law school remains the selfless desire to contribute to making our world a better place to be...to make a difference....to contribute to mankind.

I could go on and on telling you about yourselves for there are truly 112 stories in your 1L class, more among our International JDs and LLMs, exchange students and transfer students – 134 in all entering this year. All of them shed light on your personalities, hopes and dreams. I began by issuing you a challenge. I challenge you to find out about that future best friend sitting beside you today – or at the end of the row. Your time here is short – whether you'll be here for three full years, your last two years, or just one year as part of the LLM program – your time here is but a blink away. You will graduate and take your place in the noble legal profession amongst those who are not just good lawyers but are doing good in the world. Hopefully, you will have met today's challenge and gotten to know your classmates in this entering class for they are the keys to your own success. Hang on – the ride is just beginning and trust me – it is one exciting ride! Good luck and good fun as you embark on the wonderful journey before you.